

## AFGHANS SEEK REFUGE IN GULF

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[Editorial by Sulaiman al-Farzali: "Afghans in the Gulf"]

[Text] The Gulf region began taking its share of Afghan refugees who have left their country after entry of Soviet forces. Thus Afghani caravans joined Indian, Pakistani, Ceylonese, Philippine, Korean and other groups. Some give preference to Afghani people because of being muslim and "mujahedin." "If the Gulf has room for others, then it has room for the Afghans as well." Accordingly, the degree of importance of certain Arab communities there has been reduced from first to third or fourth place. There are certain Gulf regions where Palestinians, for example, come fourth after the Indians, Pakistanis and Egyptians. With the entry of Afghans into the region, the degree of importance of Arab communities will continue its downward trend, unless a stable and collective habitation plan is established. The existence of the Gulf Cooperative Council [GCC] as a Gulf league would make it possible for such a collective plan to be realized.

The political and social significance of population distribution in the Gulf region is well known to both the rulers and people alike. However, public opinion in the Gulf sympathizes more with the Arabs, in their capacity as individuals working in their country, than with other communities, although such sympathy is not realized to a full extent on the social level.

It is reported that a new trend of political sensitivity is beginning to appear. One of the Gulf rulers has been shown an article in an Indian newspaper appearing in Keralah district which is under total control of communists, to the effect that in spite of the Indian workers in that emirate being a majority nevertheless they do not enjoy a proportional degree of political and social rights, and the paper demands political representation for them.

Silent whispers are circulating now, that Afghani refugees should be allowed to draft as soldiers in the armed forces of certain Gulf states on the basis that they are brave warriors and that they are able to understand Arab mentality easier than other Asians, apart from being able to learn Arabic much quicker!

There may be certain truth in the above statement, but many Arabs of the Gulf region are not happy about such a trend although it is in its early stages. Their point of argument is that if the Afghans truly are "mujahedin," they must go back and fight against Soviet forces; the defense of the Gulf is ultimately the responsibility of the Arabs themselves. Furthermore giving shelter to the Afghans as workers who aim to make a living, is a matter different from having them as soldiers in the armed forces because if it exceeds a reasonable limit it would turn into a provocative element against the Soviet Union and her friends!

Some of the Gulf people are afraid that the trend to use Afghani refugees as soldiers in the armed forces stems from American advice, and they consider this similar to reliance on South Korean and nationalist Chinese companies and institutions from the security point of view. There may be a lot of exaggeration in this opinion, namely that it is based on incorrect interpretations, full of misgivings and suspicions rather than facts and experience. The reason why this opinion is given some weight and listening to it would be a natural consequence, is the exploding situation in the neighborhood of the Gulf and also the real fear of the military struggle being extended into the region to the extent that the question of security or the defense of the Gulf would take priority in all considerations and anxieties and in all possible or probable means to be adopted for their settlement!

Accordingly, one of the Gulf intellectuals has stated that if "Afghanism" is now the prevailing fashion, then we should also dye our beards with henna!

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